

Carl Sargeant AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Cyfoeth Naturiol  
Minister for Natural Resources



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-P/CS/0398/15

Alun Ffred Jones AM  
Chair of the Environment and  
Sustainability Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015

Dear Alun Ffred,

Thank you for your letter of 6 October about the progress of our marine commitments in Wales. I have addressed your comments in the order they were raised.

To clarify, the purpose of the Marine Transition Programme (MTP) is to prioritise key changes to the management of Welsh seas in a co-ordinated way and will run until 2020. The MTP budget is reviewed on an annual basis to better align with our European and Statutory commitments and make best use of our available resources.

The Welsh Government is building on aims set out in the November 2013 Wales Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan and the main initiatives remain on course. We continue to work with our stakeholders to build collaborative ways of working. The Marine Strategic Governance Board continues to meet regularly and is proving to be both informative and instrumental in developing integrated marine policy.

We are making a contribution to the protection of biodiversity through our substantial network of marine protected areas. In addition, biodiversity is one of the 11 components under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) against which we are required to achieve Good Environmental Status – this is currently on track. To reflect the importance of biodiversity in the marine environment, we are also establishing a biodiversity sub-group of the Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group (WMSAG). WMSAG is a broad group of stakeholders that supports the implementation of the MTP and assist with the engagement of marine organisations. The purpose of the biodiversity sub-group will be to identify, prioritise and develop initiatives to halt and reverse the loss of marine biodiversity. The Nature Recovery Plan will be published at the end of the year and includes an outline of our approach to marine biodiversity.

In terms of the implementation of the MSFD, I will be publishing the Government response to the Programme of Measures consultation by the end of the year.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The recently updated Statement for Public Participation (SPP) clearly states our commitment to work collaboratively to deliver the first Welsh National Marine Plan. The timeframes are set out within the SPP.

This will be the first time that Wales has a national marine plan to provide for the sustainable use of our seas. The public engagement, which is about to start, is to prompt wide and meaningful discussion and gain input on the policies and direction set out in our initial draft of the marine plan. This engagement will build on the work that has been done so far and I am grateful for the input of stakeholders who have given their time to help shape the plan.

This important next step will mean the draft marine plan I will put forward for implementation will have benefitted from the expertise and input from people, businesses, and coastal communities who depend on the sea in many ways. I will be making an initial full draft of the plan available this month and my officials will be holding a series of drop-in sessions around Wales to start this engagement.

We have made significant progress on marine evidence in Wales. Officials have undertaken the Strategic Scoping Exercise, collating available evidence and identifying issues, which has led to the production of the Wales Marine Evidence Report (WMER). We now have an overview of marine evidence of relevance to Wales in one place. The Report provides a firm basis and is the first step toward developing our marine evidence strategy. This is available on the Welsh Government website at the following [link](#).

Assessing our current marine protected areas is challenging but vital in order for us to fully understand our contribution to the network and identify if we need to do anything further. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Natural Resources Wales are working on this together and have made good progress. My officials have updated the WMSAG on progress and the work is on track to be completed by the end of December 2015.

In respect of offshore Marine Conservation Zones, should responsibility for nature conservation in the offshore area be transferred to Welsh Ministers we will then consider the needs of the wider network before making any decisions about the designation of additional sites.

For our fisheries activities, the priority order for reviewing the legislation has been developed with stakeholder involvement through the Fisheries Management Board. Much progress has been made in what is a very complex set of regulations. Work has progressed in respect of the Order to regulate crustacean fisheries. The draft legislative text has been laid for comment under the EU Technical Standards process, following extensive consultation with Welsh industry. If there are no objections raised by other Member States through that process, I plan to lay the SI in the Assembly in late November with a coming into force date around 1 February 2016.

To further improve compliance amongst fishers and those who buy what they land, we have worked with agencies and produced information for pubs and restaurants to raise awareness of their responsibilities in buying fish. This aims to ensure that fish on our plate is legally-caught – this is important to secure the sustainability of stocks and a productive future for the industry in Wales. A poster will also issue as part of this work to illustrate minimum sizes of each fish species commonly caught in Wales. This will help buyers and retailers know that the fish they buy is above the legal minimum size that gives the fish a chance to reproduce.

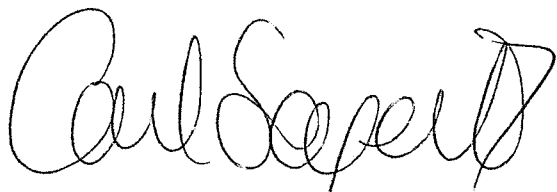
With regard to European funding, my officials have been working with other UK administrations on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The position is that

the UK Operational Programme (OP), which sets out how the fund will be used across the UK, needs to be approved by the Commission. We currently await that approval following formal submission in October.

My officials have been working with the other UK administrations to develop a UK Marine Strategy as a requirement of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). A key component of this directive relates to marine litter. The proposed programme of measures is adequate to meet the needs of the directive, however, I am keen that we further improve the evidence-base to better understand the issue and identify any further considerations. My officials are working with the Marine Conservation Society to analyse their data with a focus on identifying pressures and trends of litter on the Welsh coastline.

I trust this information will resolve the concerns you covered in your letter and provides you with an update of our progress.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Sargeant', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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